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13 MAR 1965

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

**SUBJECT: Communist Reactions to U.S. Air Attacks
on North Vietnam**

I have examined our recent Intelligence Community estimates on Communist reactions to sustained U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam and find no reason in the events of the past ten days to change the views therein. This judgment is supported by senior staff advisers and the Board of National Estimates.

We said the initial Communist reaction would be to try to make the United States desist by threats, propaganda, and diplomatic pressure, plus a continuation of Viet Cong attacks in South Vietnam. This is what has happened so far.

We also considered how this reaction would change if vigorous sustained air attacks damaged some important economic or military assets in North Vietnam, as would be likely if the strikes increase in frequency and hit north of the 19th parallel. The majority of

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the members of the U.S. Intelligence Board concurred in my view that in these circumstances the Communists might try to secure a respite from U.S. air attack by some political negotiation and a reduction of Viet Cong activity. We concluded that this reaction was more likely than a Communist decision to intensify the struggle, accepting the destructive consequences in North Vietnam in the expectation of early victory in the South. The State Department stated that the latter reaction seemed more likely than the first. I doubt that these views would change if formally reviewed today.

I have only one reservation in this regard. If Viet Cong military strength and capabilities are greater than we have supposed, as a review of the data now in process suggests, this factor might alter the general situation. ✓

Of course, the danger of more extreme Communist military reactions increases as more vital parts of North Vietnam are damaged and as attacks come nearer to the border of Communist China. Conversely, if air attacks reached past the 19th parallel but did

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not damage important economic or military assets,
the reaction would probably be the same as at present,
neither Communist concessions nor large-scale Communist
military actions.

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((Signed)) JOHN A. McCONE

JOHN A. McCONE
Director

DDI:RSC:jr

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